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New Factors in the Problem
of American Internationalism



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Number I

*New Factors in the Problem
of
American Internationalism*

By

WILLIAM P. MERRILL

WORLD ALLIANCE
FOR INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP
THROUGH THE CHURCHES

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IT is time for a new deal in the matter of America's International Relationships. I can think of no other simile which can so adequately and forcibly set forth the present situation, as to say that we need a new deal. Of all the futile and dreary occupations that pass for recreation or sport, none is more utterly worthless than to sit and talk, after the game is over, whether it be golf, bridge, or mah jong, of the way we played the game, and the way we ought to have played it, and how we would have played it had fate dealt more kindly with us. Yet that has been all too much the occupation of internationally-minded groups in America during the past few years. The chief topics of debate have been whether we might not be in the League of Nations if President Wilson had played the game differently, or if the Republican Senators had not been so narrow-minded, or if Art. X had been eliminated. Over and over we have turned back and tried to show how the furrow might have been ploughed, and where the chief blame rests for the comparative isolation of our country. It is time to let the dead past bury its dead, and to go on after the Kingdom of God, which is always at hand, always just ahead.

The best thing that could happen in the matter of America's relation to the rest of the world would be to forget or ignore past mistakes and alignments, and face the question afresh. Of course we can do that only after a comparative

fashion. The past, as Bergson reminds us, has a way of confronting us as a living factor in the present. We cannot go on just as if the past were different. But the nearer we can come to that course, the straighter and surer will be our progress.

It has seemed that it might be well if, at the opening of this annual meeting of the World Alliance, we should remind ourselves of the changes that have taken place which make it natural to call for and expect a new deal in this international game. We may be amazed, as we look into the matter, to realize how many and how significant are the new factors in the problem. The way lies clear, as it has not before, for a new and honorable and satisfying policy of internationalism on the part of our country.

First among the new factors we may note the softening of feeling due to lapse of time and change of personnel.

The central figures in the bitter fight of six years ago have largely passed from the scene. The great leader, whose brilliant insight, and mastery of words, and high idealism made him an object of passionate loyalty and passionate enmity, has passed to the judgment of God. Partisanship no longer rages around him. Other leaders in that bitter partisan strife, in which the League Covenant was tossed about and

wrecked, so far as American participation is concerned, have gone, or their hold has weakened. It means much that this softening of issues has taken place, that personal and partisan considerations may well be laid aside. We should call on ourselves and on all others to let past struggles and differences pass into history, and to view the problem afresh, in the light of the present day. When, in the recent campaign, a candidate for a high office used, in his speech of acceptance, the old language of opponents of the League, though the terms used were but a half dozen years old, they sounded like a voice from the catacombs. Let the dead bury its dead. Whatever might have been, let us occupy ourselves with what may be.

A second new factor of great significance is the change in European conditions. Whether or ⁹no America's entrance into the League six years ago would have averted or multiplied the miseries of the past dragging years, Europe is emerging. There has come at last tangible evidence that Germany and France want to live together on terms of decent intercourse. Countries that were prostrate and hopeless have begun to awaken and to struggle to their feet. There is a new spirit in Europe, less desperate, more hopeful. Those who have honestly or selfishly feared that America might become involved in a hopeless situation, or

who have in a godless spirit thanked God we were out of that mess, may now let their fears subside. Some of us thank God that, even at the worst, we stood for getting into the mess, not for getting out of it. But this is clear, that things are now better. There is less to fear, and more to hope for, in world conditions. That fact calls for a new outlook, and a new appraisal of duty and opportunity, on the part of our country.

The third factor, one of great importance, is that the very real and honest objections of many liberal men and women to the Treaty of Versailles have been in part at least overcome by the actual course of events.

The most serious opposition to American participation in international affairs was that which came from true-hearted liberals, who felt that the fourteen points had been shelved, and a treaty made on old lines of imperialism and national aggrandizement. I believe that feeling has been greatly softened, if it has not disappeared; in part, through a better understanding of the treaty; in part, through actual modification of its terms. A plan for reparations has been worked out, accepted by Germany, put into actual operation. Other modifications of the extreme provisions of the treaty have taken place. Some of its provisions, as to reassignment of territory and populations, have worked out better than seemed pos-

sible at the outset. It has become more and more clear that the Treaty of Versailles will not be definitely taken up and revised, that it is a *fait accompli*, to be dealt with and modified in the actual interplay of nations. Here also a new factor has entered, and a divisive influence been lessened or removed.

A fourth factor in the new situation is the increasingly clear evidence that Europe is not looking to the United States to bear all its burdens, to pay all its debts, and to act in general as receiver for a bankrupt civilization. There was a very real apprehension, which had great influence on the minds and judgments of many, that Europe was anxious to get America into the League of Nations, in order to draw on American resources, and to turn over its troubles to our country. Anyone who knows the situation at all, knows now that Europe has no such secret motive. The very fact that the European nations have become much more indifferent than they were to the question of our entering the League should relieve the minds of the fearful here in America. We may approach the question of our international relations quite frankly, with no hidden fear that some one is trying to entrap us into a scheme in which we shall pay and the other shall benefit.

A fifth factor of importance in the new situa-

tion, and a very great one, is the history of the League of Nations, its course of development so far. Practically everything that it has done, and not less the many things it has not done, serve to dissipate the fears, and to remove the objections of those who opposed it, and to encourage the hopes of those who favored it.

I can but mention a few of the outstanding developments which are most significant, though one would like to enlarge on each, and to specify many more.

First of all, the League has shown not the slightest sign of becoming a super-state, or of imposing its will by force.

In the face of the actual development of the League, anyone who still talks of it as an attempt to form a super-state writes himself down a fool. It has gone about its business quietly. It has trusted in the best armaments and forces, those of public opinion and the consciousness of mankind, and in those alone. It has been content to grow quietly and naturally. It has practically shelved the bogey of Article X, or so interpreted that famous section as to dispel the fears that gathered round it.

Again, the League has clearly demonstrated the fact that it is not a mere instrument for enforcing the Treaty of Versailles.

Many opposed it vehemently and honestly on

that ground. Their fears have been shown to be groundless, and their opposition unjustified. The League has definitely gone on other lines. And it has proved its power and value, in averting threatened strife, in making for confidence and justice, without arrogating to itself dangerous power, or regarding itself as the inflexible executive of a rigid compact.

Best of all, the League has revealed itself as a valuable means of international cooperation for many great and worthy ends. Indeed it is indispensable. Should it cease to function, we would have to create another at once. It is increasingly useful as a means of international conference and progress, not only nor chiefly in political matters, but in those economic, social, scientific and industrial matters which affect so deep'y the common life of all peoples in the world. The League is coming to be more and more the indispensable agent of the world-life.

Simply to recount what the League has done, to point out what it has refrained from doing, to show the plain facts of its development, ought to dispel all fears of honest folk, and give us a new basis for estimating our rightful attitude toward it. We have no right to decide America's attitude toward the League on the basis of what men said for and against it, when it was a project yet to be tried. Look at what it *is*, and decide by that.

A sixth new factor in the situation is the extent to which America has already gone in the matter of cooperation with other nations in the League and out of it.

It has been conclusively shown that, whether we desire it or no, we cannot live apart. Our interests are closely interwoven with the interests of the rest of the world; and our better instincts lead us to generous cooperation. Already we have begun and carried on a considerable amount of real and effective cooperation. Some of us have been irritated by the excessive caution of the government, the elaborate care to avoid seeming to give official character to our cooperation. But all of us took satisfaction from the eagerness with which the administration claimed some credit for the success of the Dawes plan. Let men be inconsistent, if only they will come right in the end! We may be very sure that America will never withdraw from that policy of actual cooperation, and that inevitably it will lead to more and more. The question, "Shall we cooperate?" has become obsolete. We are cooperating. The question now is, in what way, openly and frankly, or on the side; and how much, as little as possible or as much as possible?

Out of the many new factors that might be enumerated, I will give but one more,—the removal of certain hangovers from the past.

Over the Federal administration during the past four years has rested the obsession of a mandate from the American people against international cooperation. Many of us believe that that was a gross misinterpretation of the 1920 election; but nevertheless that interpretation was in force, and was powerful. That cloud, thank heaven, is removed. The League of Nations was not an issue in the election just held. That simple fact clears the ground of much incumbrance. There rested also over the last administration a cloud of uncertainty on account of the confusing assurances given during the campaign. The government seemed to have committed itself both for and against possible cooperation with other nations. It is no wonder that its course has been hesitant and uncertain. The present President of the United States is a conservative man of unusually loyal spirit. He has been holding office not in his own right, but as heir to another.

Now all that is changed. The President and the administration will go in and go on free from obligations to the past, free from the overhang of an election in which internationalism was felt to be a major issue. We may well appeal confidently to the President, the Secretary of State, and the other officers of the national government, to face the problem afresh, and for themselves, to lead the nation into a satisfying policy and program of international relationship.

These factors certainly make a new deal necessary, and warrant the call for a fresh, living, fearless approach to the question of our country's duty and responsibility in its relations with the rest of the world. The church people of America should voice such a call confidently and persistently.

What shall they call for? What is a simple, sufficient program for which to strive during the next few months? The wisdom of many should deal with that question. But I may be allowed to set forth as a basis for discussion, a simple program of four elements.

Some may think it overbold for me thus to suggest our goals. They may even remind me that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread." I am cheerfully ready to accept the implication, and would answer that that is why fools have done a lot more for human progress than angels have done, because the fools are willing to rush in, while the angels wait until they can walk in with dignity, and without fear of soiling their white wings.

This is the program I would suggest, to be urged upon the government and people of the United States by the religious forces of the nation, and by all men and women of international goodwill.

First: The entrance of the United States into

the Permanent Court of International Justice. The President has unequivocally and repeatedly put himself on record as in favor of this action. The best thing about a silent man is that when he does speak it commits him. And Mr. Coolidge is conspicuous for the tenacity with which he pursues an object until he gets it. We should confidently and strongly call for this definite action.

Second: We should do our utmost to push forward in every possible way the movement for the *outlawry of war*. It is an alluring phrase, and we should keep our eyes open to the real danger that we shall be content with a phrase, and leave it devoid of a practical meaning and a tangible program. Idealists have this as one of their chief faults, that they glow with enthusiasm over the ideal, but become easily dissatisfied over the practical steps toward it. Some are setting over against each other as irreconcilable propositions, the outlawry of war by agreements between governments, and the putting of sanctions of economic and military force back of such agreements, as is proposed in the Geneva Protocol. The whole question, in all its phases, should be examined thoroughly, patiently, and generously, by the people of America; and the religious people should lead in that work of immediate importance. It is highly encouraging that the Presi-

dent of the United States has indicated so strongly his conviction that war should be outlawed. The religious folk of America should leave him in no uncertainty as to the backing they give him in that matter.

Third: We should keep up the fight for reduction of armaments. The Washington Conference should be a beginning, not an ending. Indeed it will be of no real or lasting value, unless it is followed up. Other similar gatherings should be held. Should the nations now considering adherence to the Protocol agree to call a Conference on Disarmament during the year 1925, our country should accept heartily the invitation to participate. Aside from all other considerations, it would be an everlasting disgrace for America to be put before the world as willing to take part in such a conference, only when we call it, and it meets in this country.

Fourth: We should call for frank recognition of the League of Nations as a going concern, and an important one, a body with which the United States feels honored to have dealings: and for the fullest possible measure of cooperation with the League consistent with non-membership in it.

It may be best that the United States should not join the League of Nations. That is a debatable proposition. At any rate, it is probable that for some years to come we shall be out of the

League. Most of us would agree that it is better not to go in until the people are on the whole ready to do so.

But meanwhile, now, without waiting, it is time for a new policy of frank recognition and full cooperation, unembarrassed by the fact that we cannot enter into full membership at present. We should pay our share of the expense of such cooperative work as we participate in. It is clear that the League has nothing for us to fear, and clear also that the nations in the League would generously welcome such cooperation and participation as we might give under existing conditions.

Fifth: Christian people should cooperate heartily and generously in the agencies through which the Church is striving to exert its influence for a right international order. We who belong to the World Alliance, and have watched its development from near at hand, may be pardoned if we stress particularly the importance and value of this movement and organization. Just because it is a voluntary organization, free from ecclesiastical control, it can move promptly and speak freely, even if it does not carry so much weight as official bodies do. Moreover, it is based on a single and absolutely simple conviction, that the churches of the world, just as they are, without waiting for the outworking of plans for church unity, or the

outcome of deliberations on faith and order, can begin at once and all together to function as leading agents in the creation and fostering of goodwill in international life. The World Alliance is doing that work, with increasing power and success. It has Councils in 28 countries, in Europe, Asia, and America. It employs an International Secretary, who is doing invaluable work in bringing about regional conferences, particularly in places where international relations are strained, or misunderstandings have arisen. It holds meetings of its International Committee which are helpful and important. Here in America it issues a Newsletter to its members, which keeps them in touch with phases of the movement toward international peace and goodwill; it holds an annual national conference, carries on campaigns in special places, and at special times, and spreads much valuable information; in all this acting as a means of co-operation. No Christian who is interested, as all Christians should be, in the advance of the movement to have done with war and to bring about peace through goodwill, can afford to remain outside the fellowship of this organization.

Here are practical ends for all earnest men and women to seek. Here is a program that is idealistic, without being visionary. The combined religious forces of America, if aroused and coordinated, can bring about the full accomplish-

ment of such a program. Let us rise and do it!

It is time for a new deal. We have the right and the duty to call for it in no uncertain tones. Why should not the religious folk and forces of America address to the man now President in his own right, in all respect and loyalty, with confidence and hope, and in a strong tone of conviction,— such a call as this:

“Calvin Coolidge, honored by the people of America with such a vote of confidence as few men have received, and deeply conscious as we know you are of the sacred responsibility that comes with such an election, lead us out from the shadows of the past, let go old issues and judgments based on facts that are no longer facts; lead us into a sane, brave, frank, full policy of co-operation with all the world, in the name of the Master of all Christians, and the Father of all men.”

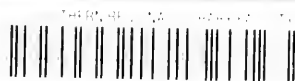
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